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Any self-respecting hedonist knows how to indulge... and Lifestyle Editor Bryony Whitehead does that pretty well.

Find intimacy after cancer

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So much is written about the subject of cancer; how to prevent it, signs to look out for and how to treat it. But very little is said about the life and relationship challenges that face most survivors, especially if the disease has caused radical body changes.

According to the US National Cancer Institute, "Physical factors (in sexual dysfunction) include functional damage secondary to cancer therapies, fatigue, and pain. In addition, cancer therapy such as surgery, chemotherapy, radiation therapy, and bone marrow transplantation may have a direct physiologic impact on sexual function.

"Medications used to treat pain, depression, and other symptoms may contribute to sexual dysfunction. Psychological factors include ... coexisting depression, changes in body image after surgery, and stresses to personal relationships that occur secondary to cancer."

So finding your own self-confidence and sense of well-being is difficult enough, but rediscovering intimacy can be even harder and there aren't too many textbooks that explain what to do. Pure Romance founder and CEO Patty Brisben, along with Dr Keri Peterson, has written a book called Sexy Ever After to help women overcome post cancer relationship anxiety.

Brisben said: "I have been working with women for years through the Patty Brisben Foundation but until I started the foundation, I didn't realise how little information there was on this subject. Information is important and should readily be available for everyone who has cancer. On a positive note, cancer does not always carry a death sentence but it does mean that survivors will have to work hard to 'get their sexy back'.

"One of the reasons we wrote the book was so that we could fill a void on information that is available to cancer survivors."

The Patty Brisben Foundation for Women's Sexual Health conducted a study which found that 95 percent of young survivors of breast cancer have indicated that cancer has adversely affected their sexuality.

Brisben and Peterson's Sexy Ever After will provide readers with good tools to get back in the game. Pure Romance has also specifically designed intimacy enhancement aids for post-cancer survivors which are approved by the US Food and Drug Administration and available in the company's Pink Ribbon range.

The Sexy Ever After e-book can be downloaded from www.pureromance.co.za and covers a range of post-cancer related intimacy topics. Among Brisben's top tips:

- Communication is key. Maintain an open line of communication with your partner – he cannot read your mind.
• Be open with your partner and with yourself—do not think of communication as just being one-way.
• Redefining sex is a recurring theme of this book – sometimes things have to be done a little differently to before.
• Bear in mind there are quite a few types of cancers that can affect various parts of the body in different ways. The simple fact is that after cancer your body will not be the same but that's okay.
• Embrace the idea that intimacy isn't just intercourse; rediscover the romance that made you a couple in the first place.

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